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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the instrumental case in four languages (English, Hungarian, Kongo, and Nepali) compares expressions of each of the deep cases of instrumentality (tool, body part, material, and force) in each language. Observations are based on a translation exercise given to native speakers of the languages and on follow-up interviews. The translation sentences included: "she caught the fish with a net"; "he hit the bird with a stone"; "they guarded their house with dogs"; "she cut the string with her teeth"; he paid for the meal with cash"; "the sun filled the room with light"; "he plowed the field with a horse"; "they traveled by plane"; "he made the furniture with wood"; "they put out the fire with water and dirt"; and "they farmed the land with slaves." It was found that instrumentality was manifested in a wide variety of ways, sometimes comparable to other languages and sometimes not. (MSE)

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The Expression of the Instrumental Case

in

English, Hungarian, Kongo, and Nepali

Stanley J. Zehr

June 1997

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In his discussion of the instrumental case, Nilsen (1973) refers to four underlying deep cases which surface instrumentally. These deep cases, which are termed as "tool," "body part," "material," and "force," all express the general meaning of an entity which is used by an agent (or force) for some function. In a more specific sense, however, each of the deep cases of instrumentality has its own peculiar meaning or subcategories of meaning which are derived from varying features of animacy, intentionality, causability, and concreteness.

Because of this variation in and among the deep cases, the meaning of instrumentality is expressed on the surface in very unique ways among different languages. To illustrate this phenomenon, I will present some varied forms and meanings which express the deep cases of instrumentality in four different languages: English, Hungarian, Kongo (a Bantu language), and Nepali. My observations of the instrumental meanings in these languages are based on a translation exercise which was given to native speakers of the languages and on follow-up interviews (see sample translation exercise and reference page). By comparing and contrasting the instrumental meanings of the expressions which were provided by the informants, we can discover some common linguistic tendencies which may help us to more sharply define the instrumental case.

It seems appropriate to begin by focusing on the deep case of "tool," since this case seems to represent the prototype of

instrumentality. The term "tool" commonly refers to something which is manipulated by an agent to perform some action. As a result, the "tool" or "instrument" is directly involved in the performed action, but not volitionally. One of the most important distinctions between the roles of an instrument and an agent, then, involves the feature of [-intent] for instruments and [+intent] for agents (Nilsen, 1973).

As a basic example of the "tool" instrumental case, consider 2 from the questionnaire:

2. He hit the bird with a stone.

In this sentence the stone is used by the male agent for hitting the bird. Like other typical "tool" instruments, the stone is an inanimate, concrete object which is unintentionally and yet directly involved in creating the effect of the hitting action. To apply Nilsen's assignment of features, the stone is thus [-animate], [+concrete], [-intent] and [+cause]. These features are common to other typical "tool" instruments as well (*eg* hammer, fork, towel, broom, etc.)

In English the instrumental case of such "tool" nouns is indicated with the preposition *with*. There are also other instrumental nouns which take the preposition *by*. Before probing further into such issues of variation, however, let us first of all examine the other languages' translations for 2, which will illustrate the markers and the preposition which function in the prototypical "tool" instrumental case in these languages. In this section of the paper I will also review any existing alter-

native functions of the markers and the preposition, as well as introduce some of the other relevant coexisting markers and prepositions in these three languages.

Beginning with Hungarian, then, the instrumental function of the "stone" in 2 is conveyed through the marker *-vel*:

2. Megdobta a madarat egy kovel.
he threw to hit the bird a stone-with

Phonologically, the marker *-vel* alternates with *-val* (as observed in later examples.) Another rule assimilates the initial /v/ of *-vel/-val* to a preceding consonant (Whitney, 1982:23). With regards to the function of this marker, it can convey an instrumental or a comitative meaning, depending on the context. In this respect, the functions of *-vel/-val* seem similar to the instrumental and comitative functions of *with* in English. As for the existence of other relevant markers which compete with *-vel/-val* in Hungarian, we will later observe the use of *-tol*, which means "from."

Directing our attention next to Kongo, in this language the preposition *mu* is used for instrumentality:

2. Wa zuba nuni mu tadi.
he hit bird with stone

Here this preposition has an instrumental meaning of "with" or "by means of". In other contexts *mu* can mean "in" or "from." Despite this broad meaning, however, *mu* is distinguished from the comitative *ye*, which means *with* as a preposition and *and* as a

conjunction. *Mu* also stands in contrast to the preposition *kua*, which has a different meaning of "by" in certain kinds of "instrumental-like" phrases which will be discussed later.

As for Nepali, this language has an instrumental marker *-le* which is used as well for the agentive case role. Sentence 2 is therefore translated as:

2.	Usle	dhungale	charalai	hanyo.
	he (agent)	stone (instr.)	bird	hit

Besides the instrumental *-le*, Nepali also has a comitative marker: *-sath/-sita*. Other relevant markers for our discussion include *-bata*, which indicates "from" or "by," and the marker *-dwara*, which also means "by."

Having therefore surveyed the four languages' instrumental markers and prepositions, along with their alternate meanings and grammatical counterparts, we can now concentrate on the specific instrumental meanings which are conveyed through the languages. Thus far we can affirm that the context of 2 elicits a common meaning of instrumentality among the four languages. It is apparent that contexts such as 2, which involve a prototypical "tool" instrument, felicitously use a certain grammatical marker or preposition which can function instrumentally to express this meaning.

In contrast, other contexts which involve special kinds of "tool" instruments seem to evoke cross-linguistic variation in the expression of instrumentality. For example, in 1: "She caught the fish with a net," the net "tool" is translated in Kongo with the instrumental *mu*, as we might expect. In Hungar-

ian, however, 1 would mostly likely be spoken as follows:

1.	Kihalaszta	a	halet.	
	she netted	the	fish	

The Hungarian informant also provided a translation which used the instrumental *-val* on the noun for "net," but she stressed that the above translation is more natural. Apparently the semantic identity of the "net" instrument is so closely tied to the action of fishing that it naturally appears in the verbal sense.

Nepali also expresses a close association between the instrument and the action, but uses a participle instead of the main verb:

1.	Unle	jal	halera	macha	marin.
	she	net	throwing	fish	killed

Here the participle "throwing" is joined to the instrument to give it a very active sense. It seems that the participial phrase as a whole thus functions to clarify the kind of action which was used to catch (or kill) the fish.

Other examples which involve an even more unique kind of "tool" instrument are found in 3, 7, and 11. These contexts, however, would seem to violate the basic feature assignment of [-animate] for "tool" instruments, since the entities which might be considered as "tools" in 3, 7, and 11 are living beings: "dogs," "a horse," and "slaves." Nevertheless, these beings seem to fulfill some kind of instrumental role; in these sentences

they are used by agents for a certain function.

Of the three contexts, 7 seems to provide the strongest example for the possibility of an animate "tool":

7. He plowed the field with a horse.

Here the agent "he" uses the horse as an instrument for the action of plowing. This interpretation is supported by Nepali, which uses the instrumental *-le* in 7:

7.	Usle	ghodale	khet	jotyo.
	He	horse (instr)	field	plowed

The Hungarian version similarly portrays the instrumental role of the horse in the plowing action:

7.	Loval	szantotta	fel	a	foldet.
	horse-with	he plowed (perfective)		the	field

According to the informant, this sentence could be translated into English as: "It was with a horse that he plowed the field."

The Kongo translation, however, presents a different perspective on the meaning of 7. Instead of putting the horse in the typical instrumental role, Kongo assigns the horse to an agentive role. This agentivity is based on the fact that the horse, and not the man (*ie* "he"), did the actual work of plowing. The man was only indirectly involved in the action of plowing. Consequently, Kongo uses a causative verb and the preposition *kua* ("by") to declare: "He had the field plowed by a horse":

7.	Wa	timusa	via	kua mvalu.
	He caused to be plowed		field	by horse

This sentence illustrates a contrast between the prepositions *kua* and *mu*: *mu* commonly designates an inanimate instrument which can not perform the action by itself; the instrument is simply used in the action. *Kua*, however, designates an animate agent which itself performs the action.

The Kongo translation thus reveals a point of variation in interpreting the meaning of 7. Among the four languages, there seems to be a difference in perspective as to whether the horse fulfills an instrumental role or an agentive role. From the perspective of English, Hungarian, and Nepali, the horse is used instrumentally by the agent "he" for the plowing action. From the perspective of Kongo, however, the horse itself carries out an active, agentive role in the actual performance of the plowing, while "he" has a qualified agentive role of instigator in the plowing action.

Related to this difference in perspective is the question of whether an entity which is [+animate] can be classified as a true instrument or not. The translations of 7 would suggest that three of the languages sometimes permit animate instruments, while Kongo restricts instruments to those entities which are [-animate].

Other examples seem to indicate that Kongo is not the only language which avoids classifying animates as instruments, however. Consider the following translations for 11:

11. They farmed the land with slaves.

Hungarian: Rabszolgak dolgoztak a foldjeiken.
slaves worked the field-their-on

Nepali: Dasharule uniharuko jaminma kheti gare.
slaves their land farm (past)

Kongo: Ba sadisa via kua miuumbu.
They caused land by slaves
to be farmed

In the English sentence the slaves seem to have been used instrumentally by the agentive "they" for the purpose of farming. In the other translations, however, the slaves are described in an agentive role, since they are the ones who did the actual work of farming. Apparently these languages consider the agentive role of the slaves as being more predominant than their instrumental role in the action of farming.

This emphasis on the slaves' agentivity is probably brought about by the contrast between the active, prominent role of the slaves versus the passive, distant role of "they" in the work of farming. Because of this contrast, it is natural to stress the agentivity of the slaves over that of "they." Notice that "they" is instead assigned to a possessive meaning in Hungarian and Nepali (*ie* "their land"), while in Kongo it is joined to a causative verb (as in 7) to portray its qualified meaning of instigative agentivity.

These three languages thus seem to focus on the agentivity of the animate "tool" rather than on its instrumentality whenever the animate "tool" has an independently active, agentive function. This conclusion is supported by 3, which parallels 11 in meaning and form:

3. They guarded their house with dogs.

Hungarian: Kutyak oritzek a hazukat.
dogs guarded the house-their

Nepali: Kukurle uniharuko ghar rakshya gare.
dogs their house guard (past)

Kongo: Ba tadisa nzo awa kua zimbasa.
they caused house their by dogs
to be guarded

Again Hungarian and Nepali assign the main agentive role to the animate "tool" (*ie* "dogs"). Kongo is similarly consistent to its pattern of using a causative verb and *kua* to indicate the agentive role of the noun (*zimbasa*) which follows *kua*.

Here we should also note that the Nepali versions of 11 and 3 could be translated differently in certain dialects. These alternative translations are similar to those of Kongo in the use of causative verbs. These Nepali translations also place the animate "tool" in an agentive role (however, it is not marked as the main, instigating agent; note *tiniharule*):

3. They guarded their house with dogs.

Nepali: Tiniharule afno ghar kukurbata/kukurdwara
they own house dogs by

rakshya garae.
guard (past-causative)

11. They farmed the land with slaves.

Nepali: Uniharule dasharubata/dasharudwara jaminma
they slaves by slaves by land

kheti garae.
farm (past-causative)

The data suggests, then, that certain kinds of animate "tools" are more typically viewed as being agentive rather than instrumental. This seems true for contexts such as 3 and 11, in which the animate "tool" functions quite independently from the subject agent in performing the action. In 3, for example, the dogs most likely guard the house without direct guidance from the homeowners; they function independently of the homeowners.

In the context of 7, however, the animate "tool" is controlled and guided very closely in the course of the action. That is, the agent "he" drives the horse during each step of the plowing action; each forward movement of the horse is directly controlled by "he". Because the horse functions in such a typical "tool-like" fashion, three of the four languages quite naturally portray the horse as fulfilling an instrumental role.

Having thoroughly examined the relationship between instrumentality and the animacy feature, then, let us also consider one other kind of potential instrumental "tool": the "tool" of transportation. Sentence 8 illustrates the typical way in which a context which involves a transportation "tool" is translated among the four languages:

8.	They traveled by plane.				
Hungarian:	Reprilovel plane-with/by	utartak. traveled			
Kongo:	Wa zieta they traveled	mu by means of	ndeke. plane.		
Nepali:	Uniharule they	planebata/planedwara plane by /plane by	yatra travel	gare. (past)	

Notice first of all that the instrumental function of "plane" in

8 can be expressed with the same Hungarian marker (*-vel*) and the same Kongo preposition (*mu*) which we have already seen. In English and Nepali, however, we find some different elements from what we might expect. English uses the preposition *by* instead of *with*, and Nepali uses either *-bata* or *-dwara*, which also mean "by," in place of the typical instrumental marker *-le*.

Apparently these two languages view the instrumentality of a transportation "tool" as being somewhat different from that of a typical "tool." This point of view makes sense when we consider the relationship between the plane "tool," the agent, and the action which is involved in sentences such as 8. In this sentence the actual action of traveling is entirely based on the energy which is exhibited by the plane "tool"; the agent "they" does not supply or direct the plane "tool" with force, but is instead totally dependent upon the force of the plane for traveling. The plane is therefore unlike other typical "tools," which have less of an independent energy supply and thus depend on the force of the agent in order to function properly. In contrast to such typical "tools," the plane plays a leading, agentive role in supplying the energy which is needed for the action.

On the one hand, then, the plane functions as a kind of agent which exhibits the force of the action. On the other hand, the plane also has an instrumental role in that it is directed and used for the traveling purpose of the agent. This instrumentality allows the transportation "tool" to be identified as other "tool" instruments would be in Hungarian and Kongo. In English and Nepali, however, the agentivity of the transportation "tool"

seems to require a special preposition or marker meaning "by the force of" in this context. Consequently, the phrases *by plane* and *planebata* (or *planedwara*) appear in the translations of these two languages.

We have therefore seen that the languages of this study interpret and represent the roles of various kinds of "tool" instruments in different ways. Moving beyond the "tool" instruments, though, we should also consider how the languages handle other kinds of deep case instruments. The instrument of "body part," for example, especially seems worthy of our attention, since a "body part" instrument functions in a similar manner as a typical "tool" does. We can recognize this similarity in examples such as 4:

4. She cut the string with her teeth.

Consider how "teeth" functions in much the same way that a knife or some other typical cutting instrument would in this context. Like a typical "tool," the "teeth" are inanimate as a separate entity, and concrete. Also like an ordinary "tool," they are unintentionally and yet directly involved in creating the effect of the cutting action. To summarize, they have the same features as a typical "tool" instrument: [-animate], [+concrete], [-intent], and [+cause].

As we might expect, then, the other languages of this study express the instrumentality of a "body part" instrument such as "teeth" as though it were a typical "tool":

4. She cut the string with her teeth.

Hungarian:	logaval	elliarapta	a	spargat.
	tooth-with	bit (perfective)	the	string
Nepali:	Unle	datle	dori	katin.
	she	teeth (instr.)	string	cut
Kongo:	Wa	zenga	nsinga	mu menomani.
	she	cut	string	with teeth-her

Another deep case instrument in Nilsen's analysis is the "material" instrument. This type of instrument has a material worth which makes it useful for purposes of construction or for trade (eg putty, steel, gold, etc.) The "material" instrument differs from the "tool" instrument, then, in that the latter is useful for a different purpose of imposing an action upon another object or entity (recall the feature [+cause]). Because a "material" instrument is not used as a "tool" is used for the function of directly creating an effect upon something, a "material" instrument can be assigned the feature of [-cause]. In terms of the other features, though, a "material" instrument is similar: [-animate], [+concrete], and [-intent].

One example of a "material" instrument which functions for trading purposes is found in 5:

5. He paid for the meal with cash.

In this sentence the cash is used for making payment because of its material worth. Notice that the languages of this study seem to convey this meaning of instrumentality through the standard prepositions or markers which we have already seen:

5. He paid for the meal with cash.

Hungarian: Kezpenssel fizetett a etelert.
cash-with he paid the food-for

Nepali: Usle paisale khana tiryo.
He money-instr. meal paid

Kongo: Wa sumba madia mu mbongo.
He paid for meal with cash

When these languages use the "material" instrument of construction, though, a different prepositional meaning or a different marker may appear. In 9,

9. He made the furniture with wood.

Hungarian: Fabol keszitette a britost.
wood-from made the furniture

Nepali: Usle kathbata furniture banayo.
He wood-from furniture made

Kongo: Wa sala bikiti mu mabaya.
He made furniture from wood.

Hungarian and Nepali do not use the instrumental marker to refer to the "wood"; instead they use a marker which means "from" (*-tol* in Hungarian and *-bata* in Nepali). Kongo would similarly be translated most naturally as "from wood," even though it uses the preposition *mu* which also serves to designate an instrumental meaning. Apparently in 9 the wood is more closely identified as being a source rather than an instrument for the building action. This identity of a "source material" could also be naturally conveyed in English: "He made the furniture from wood."

Unfortunately this study does not contain further data to illustrate the meaning which is expressed with other kinds of

materials which similarly function for purposes of construction. It seems plausible, however, that a "material" instrument of construction which does not function as a source would be assigned an instrumental role. For example, in the sentence "She covered the wall with paint," it seems likely that the phrase "with paint" would be expressed instrumentally in the languages of this study.

This assumption is supported by the data which was collected for 10, in which the materials of water and dirt function destructively instead of constructively. In this context all of the translations present these materials in an instrumental role:

10. They put out the fire with water and dirt.

Hungarian: Vizrel es honokkal oltottak el a tuzet.
water-with and dirt-with put out the fire

Nepali: Tiniharule pani ra phohorle ago nibhaye.
they water and dirt-instr. fire put out

Kongo: Ba zima tiya mu maza ye fundufundu.
they put out fire with water and dirt

Leaving the issue of "material" instrumentality, then, we will next briefly consider one final instrumental deep case: the instrument of "force." This term refers to a natural force which is beyond the control of a human or animal agent and therefore can only be used instrumentally by a supernatural being or by some other natural force. The "force" instrument may thus occur in a special, religious context, such as the following:

God destroyed the earth with a flood.

In this sentence the flood "force" acts as an instrument which God, the agent, uses to destroy the earth.

Notice that a force such as the flood can be characterized in much the same way as a "tool" instrument is, except that a "force" instrument is not a concrete entity. The features of a "force" instrument are therefore [-animate], [-concrete], [-intent], and [+cause].

In comparison with the "tool" instrument and the other instruments, however, the "force" instrument is much less common. Nevertheless, let us consider one sentence from this study which involves a potential "force" instrument. In example 6, the "light" might be perceived as being used by the force "sun" for the function of filling the room:

6. The sun filled the room with light.

Hungarian:	A the	nap sun	beirlagitotta brightened	a the	szobat. room
Nepali:	Suryale sun	kotha room	ujyalo bright	banyo. made	
Kongo:	Ntangu sun	ya-fulusa filled	suku room	ye with/and	nteemo. light

Besides English, none of the other languages portray "light" in an instrumental manner in 6. In Hungarian and Nepali, the concept of light is conveyed instead through the verb phrases "brightened" or "made bright". The use of these verb phrases for referring to the light seems natural since the characteristic of bringing light is an inherent property of the sun.

In Kongo, the comitative *ye* appears with "light" instead of the instrumental *mu*. This choice is probably also based on the

close relationship between the sun and "light." In other words, it is probably more natural to view "light" as being a force which is joined to the sun rather than being a force which is used by the sun. This analysis makes further sense when we consider the fact that the sun is not a typical agent; it has no intention of using the light instrumentally for the purpose of filling the room.

Further data is needed to determine whether the above example is typical of the way in which these languages handle a "force" instrument. However, the example of 6 seems to at least suggest that a "force" which is used in an "instrumental-like" function may not necessarily be viewed as fulfilling an instrumental role.

While a "force" may thus be a fairly weak candidate for the role of instrument, we can nevertheless affirm that the other kinds of potential instruments which we have observed seem to often occur naturally in instrumental expressions. To summarize the findings of this study of instrumentality, then, the inanimate "tool" and the "body part" deep cases seem to have a particularly stable meaning of instrumentality which is consistently expressed through the instrumental prepositions and markers of English, Hungarian, Nepali, and Kongo. In addition, certain "material" instruments which are used for their value or for their effectiveness as a substance also appear naturally with an instrumental function in these languages.

We have also seen, however, that instruments which have either agentive features or a "source" identity are often por-

trayed according to these characteristics and not according to their instrumental characteristics, at least in the languages of this study. Certain kinds of animate "tools," for instance, are identified according to their own independent agentivity in performing the action of the contexts in which they are found. A transportation "tool" is similarly distinguished from a more typical "tool" through a preposition or marker which designates the special "energy-supplying," agentive feature of the transportation "tool." In addition, a "material" instrument which serves as the source of material for a particular activity of construction seems to be more naturally viewed as a source rather than as an instrument.

Further data is needed to determine whether these observations truly reflect the general tendencies of the four languages which we have considered in this study. Nevertheless, we can at least surmise that the truest instrument, in the perspective of these languages, is an inanimate "tool" which is manipulated and driven by the force of an agent. The possible universality of this conclusion needs to be tested by further cross-linguistic studies.

Translation Exercise

Translate the following sentences into your native language.

1. She caught the fish with a net.

_____

2. He hit the bird with a stone.

_____

3. They guarded their house with dogs.

_____

4. She cut the string with her teeth.

_____

5. He paid for the meal with cash.

_____

6. The sun filled the room with light.

_____

7. He plowed the field with a horse.

_____

8. They traveled by plane.

_____

9. He made the furniture with wood.

_____

10. They put out the fire with water and dirt.

_____

11. They farmed the land with slaves.

_____

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